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Cover Page Footnote

Undergraduate Student Essay

**Beings of Magic:
A Comparison of Saruman the White
in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*
and Simon the Clerk in Williams' *All Hallows' Eve***

by Kathryn Hall

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Charles Williams and J. R. R. Tolkien were both a part of the popular literary group the Inklings. Williams, an important but lesser known member, penned *All Hallows' Eve* “after he had been among the Inklings for several years” (Carpenter 170), and he often enjoyed the readings of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* during Inklings’ meetings (122-123). Despite being a member of this same scholarly circle, their writing styles are very different. Tolkien creates extravagant worlds filled with hobbits, elves, talking trees, and special languages in his *The Lord of the Rings* series, while Williams writes strange thrillers about characters attempting to reach mystical worlds as is the case in *All Hallows' Eve*. However, despite these differences, there are also some significant similarities. In both works, Tolkien and Williams incorporate sorcery as integral parts of the stories and characters. For example, Saruman the White in *The Lord of the Rings* and Simon the Clerk in *All Hallows' Eve* both use magic to do their bidding. Saruman and Simon embody Satanic qualities, and they are both overcome by the spells they practice as a consequence of manipulating others and reaching the supernatural world. Ultimately though, it is their environments that betray them—resulting in their final destruction.

In light of Tolkien’s comments on their relationship, it is unclear whether Tolkien and Williams explicitly influenced each other’s works; however, their association is undoubted. Tolkien states in his letters that he and Williams were friends, but he also makes “emphatic declarations that he and Williams had nothing in common intellectually” and that their works did not influence each other (Carpenter 122). He writes, “I knew Charles Williams well in his last few years... But I do not think we influenced one another at all! Too ‘set’, and too different. I think we both found the other’s mind (or rather mode of expression, and climate) as impenetrable when cast

into ‘literature’, as we found the other’s presence and conversation delightful” (*Letters* 209). Confirming his opinion, Tolkien writes in a later letter, “I doubt if he [Williams] had read anything of mine then available; I had read or heard a good deal of his work, but found it wholly alien, and sometimes very distasteful, occasionally ridiculous” (362). However, before then, Tolkien admits that he “was in fact a sort of assistant mid-wife at the birth of *All Hallows Eve*” (349). It is difficult to discern whether the two intentionally borrowed ideas from each other’s characters or not—especially because Tolkien also claims they listened to each other’s works in “large and largely unintelligible fragments” (209)—but the likenesses between Saruman the White and Simon the Clerk cannot be overlooked.

The parallels between Saruman and Simon begin with the traditional wizard-like appearance they share; according to the texts of *The Lord of the Rings* series and *All Hallows’ Eve*, each character possesses a cloak. Additionally, Tolkien and Williams write specific details about the eyes and facial structures of Saruman and Simon. Saruman is described as “an old man, swathed in a great cloak, the colour of which was not easy to tell, for it changed if he stirred. His face was long, with a high forehead, he had deep darkling eyes, hard to fathom, though the look that they now bore was grave and benevolent, and a little weary. His hair and beard were white, but strands of black still showed about his lips and ears” (Tolkien 601). Simon wore “some kind of cloak” (Williams 51) and “was a tall man, with a smooth mass of gray—almost white—hair; his head was large; his face thin, almost emaciated... The skin was dark and . . . [t]he eyes were . . . deeply set” (52). Additionally, Saruman and Simon have both incorporated magic so heavily in their lives that it has become a part of their very physical beings. Saruman’s voice is “low and melodious, its very sound an enchantment. . . . For many the sound of the voice alone was enough to hold them enthralled; but for those whom it conquered the spell endured when they were far away, and ever they heard that soft voice whispering and urging them.” Indeed, the tone of his voice mesmerizes his listeners: “none were unmoved; none rejected its pleas and its commands without an effort of mind and will, so long as its master had control of it” (Tolkien 601). In contrast, Simon’s voice is “urbane, a little husky, and had the very slightest foreign accent” (Williams 52), but magic clearly affects his smile more, for it is “rather a sudden convulsion . . . a kind of muscular spasm rather than a smile” (65). Simon is arguably not even a human anymore, for he uses magic to clone himself so that he can hold dominant positions in multiple

countries simultaneously (Williams 111-113). Magic has taken over Saruman and Simon; evil is eventually personified in them.

Saruman's and Simon's ultimate goal is dominance, though their approach to attain it is slightly different. Captivated by power, Saruman joins forces with Sauron in order to conquer Middle-Earth by possessing The One Ring. He begins to assemble an army to take The Ring by force. Simon's goal is a bit different but still world-dominating and power-seeking. He plans to release the backwards Tetragrammaton into the supernatural world on All Hallows' Eve—the time when Heaven and Hell come closest together. As Thomas Howard writes in his book *The Novels of Charles Williams*, "Simon is more than curious, and we find that his great experiment is to find the word or words that will furnish the man who utters them with *power*" (227). Both magicians have a specific mission in mind and are fueled by greed as well as a yearning for power; additionally, manipulation of others is a key element in both Saruman's and Simon's dominance.

Tolkien explains how the wizards in *The Lord of the Rings* cannot be exempt from free will because "in the view of this tale & mythology, Power—when it dominates or seeks to dominate other wills and minds (except by the assent of their reason)—is evil, these 'wizards' were incarnated in the life-forms of Middle-earth, and so suffered the pains both of mind and body" (*Letters* 237). This humanistic quality—the ability to become fallen—is one of the causes of Saruman's propensity to be in control. Tolkien states that his wizards were "involved in the peril of the incarnate: the possibility of 'fall', of sin. . . . The chief form this would take with them would be impatience, leading to the desire to force others to their own good ends, and so inevitably at last to mere desire to make their own wills effective by any means. To this evil Saruman succumbed" (237). Saruman is clearly forced to this level of impatience when he attempts to control King Théoden through the manipulation of his servant, Grima Wormtongue, in order to have power over the city of Rohan (Tolkien 537-542). Additionally, as stated earlier, Saruman's tone of voice compels his listeners; Tolkien states that "Saruman's voice was not hypnotic but persuasive" (*Letters* 276). This becomes one of Saruman's greatest tools of manipulation, for "[t]hose who listened to him were not in danger of falling into a trance, but of agreeing with his arguments, while fully awake. . . . Saruman corrupted the reasoning powers" (276-277).

Evidenced by his forceful control over Betty, his daughter, Simon also seeks to accomplish his evil deeds through others. Though it is not necessarily the sound of his voice that is enchanting because his reciting

of the backwards Tetragrammaton is mostly inaudible (Williams 157), like Saruman, the words Simon say are an integral aspect of his magic. It is through mouthing the letters of the Tetragrammaton in reverse that his plan will work, for when Betty's movement startles him and he is unable to maintain the recitation, the spell cannot continue without his completion of the Name's utterance and without interruption (160-162). Betty is the main vehicle Simon uses to achieve his goal of ruling both the physical and the supernatural world; without forcing her to obey him, his plan of releasing the backwards Tetragrammaton will fail. Every move Simon makes is centered around the need to abuse those around him. Simon's "interest in other selves is simply and solely to have total power over them" (Howard 228), and he also manipulates Richard and Lester to accomplish his goal. He "is interested in Richard because Richard might be the necessary link with Lester, who might supply Father Simon with an answering commodity for Betty, allowing him simultaneously to dismiss Betty from her body and this world and summon Lester into some body here from the world of the dead. He wants an exchange: that will facilitate his black plans" (233). Exploiting those around them becomes one of the primary ways that Saruman and Simon attempt to take control of their worlds.

Both Saruman and Simon function as symbols of Satan. As Lucifer, a fallen angel, was engrossed by his mission to gain power, Saruman also "perverts" his position as a wizard and stains his original purpose to be good. Tolkien explains, "the Wizards . . . first appeared about the year 1000 of the Third Age, when the shadow of Sauron began first to grow again to new shape. . . . They were thought to be Emissaries . . . and their proper function, maintained by Gandalf, and perverted by Saruman, was to encourage and bring out the native powers of the Enemies of Sauron" (*Letters* 180). Though Saruman attempts to achieve power by bending to the will of Sauron, Simon is a representation of the devil himself. As Howard points out, Simon, like Satan, has "contempt for . . . his followers" (225-226). He writes, "The analogy with Satan is unavoidable—the old notion that he hates those whom he dragoons into his camp. Evil is incapable of love that will face death for others" (226). Like Saruman, Simon turns from the choice to be good, and "[i]n his wish for power and control, he is of course guilty of Lucifer's sin: making a grab for what belongs to the Most High alone" (228). Both Saruman and Simon are "satanic" and turn away from good.

Though in different ways, Saruman and Simon each access the supernatural world. Saruman uses a magical *palantír* (while also

controlling magic through his staff and ring), and Simon controls his daughter, Betty. Saruman sees what other people are doing through his *palantír* and can also control aspects of the environment (e.g., mountains and snow) through it. He does this in *The Fellowship of the Ring* in an attempt to change the Fellowship's path into one of more peril:

“I [Aragon] knew the risk of snow, though it seldom falls heavily so far south, save high up in the mountains. But we are not high yet; we are still far down, where the paths are usually open all the winter.”

“I wonder if this is a contrivance of the Enemy,” said Boromir. “They say in my land that he can govern the storms in the Mountains of Shadow that stand upon the borders of Mordor. He has strange powers and many allies.”

“His arm has grown long indeed,” said Gimli, “if he can draw snow down from the North to trouble us here three hundred leagues away.”

“His arm has grown long,” said Gandalf. (Tolkien 306)

As stated before, Simon works through a human being rather than a magical object. He thrusts Betty into the supernatural realm in order to discover the future: “The power which Simon wishes to test out on Betty is his ability to dismiss her spirit from her body and then re-summon it. In other words, he wants the power of life and death over other human beings, Betty being merely the first experiment” (Howard 227-228). Though their modes are different, Saruman, through his *palantír*, and Simon, through his daughter, both reach the celestial dimension to complete their plans for gaining power.

Ironically, Saruman's and Simon's devices that are meant to be evil, the *palantír* and Betty, are both ultimately used for good. Saruman does not choose to get rid of the orb (rather, his servant [Wormtongue] throws it), and Gandalf remarks that the ball “is not a thing [...] that Saruman would have chosen to cast away” (Tolkien 607). This action turns out to be a fortunate twist of fate, for now, Sauron thinks the ring-bearing hobbit is in Saruman's capture. Gandalf remarks,

“There remains a short while of doubt, which we must use. The Enemy, it is clear, thought that the Stone was in Orthanc—why should he not? And that therefore the hobbit was captive there, driven to look in the glass for his torment by Saruman. That dark mind will be filled now with the voice and face of the hobbit and with expectation: it may take some time before he learns his error.” (Tolkien 618)

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At the end of *All Hallows' Eve*, Betty is able to build a connection with her friend Lester, who recently died and went to the same supernatural world Betty was accessing. Because of this, Betty's life is saved through Lester's substitution when Simon tries to release the backwards Tetragrammaton to kill her. Betty becomes happier than ever and is empowered—no longer afraid of Simon, her mother, or Evelyn (a girl she detests). She even acquires the ability to heal people: "Her immortality was strong in her. . . . She passed, so, round the whole circle, holding, touching, healing—simply and naturally, and with all the gaiety that she could" (Williams 271). The evil that Saruman and Simon try to evoke is eventually thwarted; good still prevails.

In the end, Saruman and Simon finally get their deserved destruction, and interestingly enough, their demises come through their environments. In *The Lord of the Rings*, "[t]he Ents assault and capture Isengard, the stronghold of the traitor Saruman" (Duriez 165). These Ents from Fangorn Forest are so passionate about their march to the south that they made up a chant to sing on their way:

*To Isengard! Though Isengard be ringed and barred with doors of stone;
Though Isengard be strong and hard, as cold as stone and bare as bone,
We go, we go, we go to war, to hew the stone and break the door;
For bole and bough are burning now, the furnace roars—we go to war!
To land of gloom with tramp of doom, with roll of drum, we come, we
come;
To Isengard with doom we come! With doom we come, with doom we
come!*

(Tolkien 506-507; italics Tolkien's)

Simon's surroundings also betray him when the City emits a crimson rain, which ultimately, dissolves him: "The rose began to withdraw. He felt himself carried with it and slipping more deeply into it. The smell of blood was in his nostrils; the touch of burning on his flesh; this was what the crimson must be to him. He stared, as he sank and as that in which he was held moved in its own fashion, at the rain of swift-darting points between him and himself" (Williams 266). The Ents of Fangorn Forest and the City turn on Saruman and Simon, helping to destroy the presence of evil.

Saruman and Simon are enchanters of a similar appearance and both represent a fallen Satan. As beings overcome by magic, they evoke evil over other people (primarily through manipulation and through their access of the supernatural world). Additionally, in the end, both

INKLINGS FOREVER X

characters' actions result in an unfavorable fate as their environments take revenge on them. Tolkien and Williams used these characters to prove that right will always win, for without evil present, one can never know the beauty of goodness. Like a phoenix rising out of the ashes, goodness triumphs out of these fallen characters.

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